

Inspection report for Children's Home

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home provides residential care for young people with learning difficulties, aged from 12 to under 18 years. The home is purpose-built and situated on the outskirts of a city. It is within easy reach of a range of community resources and public transport.

There are seven single bedrooms with en-suite bathroom facilities, two of which also have a small kitchenette to support young people moving towards independent living. There are two lounges, a dining area and a games room. The home additionally has staff sleeping-in, waking-night facilities and office accommodation. Young people have access to a rear garden.

At the time of inspection, seven young people average age 16 years, were accommodated and present. They all contributed to the inspection, either directly, or through observations of how they are being looked after.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This unannounced key inspection assessed the home against the national minimum standards relevant to all the areas of the outcome framework for children's homes.

Young people in this children's home benefit from very high standards of care informed by clear principles translated into excellent care practices. The environment is well planned and provides resources that promote privacy, independence and an interesting place in which to live. The young people are therefore comfortable and cared by staff that provide emotional anchorage and nurturing so each young person is free to enjoy his or her childhood.

Staff work effectively with health professionals and use the home's resources well to keep the young people in good health and, as necessary, respond appropriately to any health problems with which they present. Young people who were able to express their views say that they feel safe in the home and that it is a good place in which to live. The other young people present as relaxed and respond to staff and other young people unreservedly showing that they too feel safe and comfortable. Staff provide the young people ample opportunities to pursue a wide range of leisure activities and support them to benefit from their education. The home provides the young people with a very good quality of life.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no requirements or recommendations at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The catering arrangements are thoughtful and reflect the young people's precise needs. Mealtimes are carefully staged to provide a relaxed and enjoyable social occasion for the young people. Staff dine with the young people and use these occasions to ensure that all the young people are included. Young people, who commented on the food, rate its quality as consistently excellent and believe they have ample opportunity to influence the menus, which are varied and show that a wholesome diet is provided. Exceptional arrangements are in place to ensure that where young people require a special diet, this is provided in strict accordance with their needs. For example, appropriate foods are purchased, separately stored and prepared for young people whose religion requires this.

The planning of care and how staff respond to the young people's health needs is excellent. Some young people have a complex profile of needs including those associated with their learning difficulties. Staff work effectively with health and other professionals to ensure these young people benefit from the best care possible. The established and coherent measures such as the young people's access to primary health care services, including regular dental, optical assessment and treatment, and periodic health medical monitoring are successful in keeping the young people healthy.

Staff deal with the young people's minor illnesses and recognise when they may need to be assessed and treated by a doctor because they are provided with the necessary training to administer first aid medication safely. There are rigorous procedures and provisions to ensure that young people's medicines are kept safely and administered correctly. Careful monitoring of this aspect of care continues to contribute to the absence of error.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

One of the outstanding features of the home is that the environment is carefully planned to ensure the young people lead ordinary lives in a setting that safeguards their privacy, maintains dignity and maximises scope for personal development. This is reflected in practical arrangements, such as each young person is allocated his or her own bed sitting room, all of which have en-suite facilities. These facilities enable the young people to withdraw from the rest of the group when they prefer time alone and ensure that any assistance needed with aspects of personal care, is in private. Some of the practices used to ensure young people's privacy, such as staff knocking before entering young people's bedrooms, and guiding them to be self

sufficient in attending to their intimate care, contribute to the home's overall safe caring principles. The home generally ensures that young people have some choice in whom assist them in their intimate care and female staff take the lead when the young people are female. However, on two occasions recently only male staff were on night duty. This does not fully assist in particular aspects of care as some young people that are highly dependent, including those whose religion requires staff of the same sex.

Young people are effectively protected from poor quality service and unfair treatment by the fully compliant complaints procedure. There is recognition that although the complaints procedure is presented in a format that most young people are likely to understand, other channels are provided for those with additional communication needs. Therefore staff are alert to young people who may express dissatisfaction verbally and through their behaviour or other modes of communication. There is a commitment to listening to the young people generally and their concerns in particular. The complaints procedure is therefore actively promoted by staff and the visiting Children's Rights Officer. Staff act to address, at an early stage, any reasonable dissatisfaction that young people express thus complaints are rare. However, when there are complaints they are taken seriously and dealt with fairly.

A coherent and comprehensive safeguarding system which is well established in the home is effective in preventing abuse. Staff access ongoing training and guidance, including that for protecting disabled children, so they know how to respond appropriately to abuse or suspicion of it. There are clear safeguarding strategies and procedures, which comply with those of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The young people's positive views about the home, their relaxed demeanour and the ways in which they relate to staff and each other, reflect that they are content and safe. There are no current safeguarding concerns and no referrals or investigation since the last inspection. The same applies to young people missing from the home, which is a rare event, and for which there is also an acceptable procedure which recognises the young people's particular vulnerability.

Young people, including those who are recent residents, say that they like living in the home and that they have no worries. Some young people exhibit a high level of understanding and caring for others. The majority of the young people understand the concept and nature of bullying as a result of anti-bullying initiatives promoted by the local authority, schools and in the home. Staff recognise that some of the young people might be vulnerable to bullying outside the home, so staff encourage them to talk about such experiences so that they can equip the young people to try and avoid instances, and if necessary, deal appropriately with it.

Generally the young people behave well, are settled and content. Staff are effective in shaping the young people's social and moral development, hence kindness and consideration for others are common features amongst them. These are promoted and achieved within a comprehensive behaviour management approach that takes account of each young person's circumstances. There is, for example, recognition that when some young people behave unacceptably, this is a symptom of their difficulties or for some a means of expressing discontent. Staff therefore respond

with helpful guidance and only impose proportionate sanctions when these are understood and likely to influence a young person's future conduct. The young people respond well to the emphasis that staff place on encouraging, rewarding and reinforcing good behaviour. Where on occasions staff have had to physically restrain a young person, their training has enabled them to do so safely and within acceptable parameters. For example, young people are subject to physical intervention only to prevent them causing harm to themselves or others and in particular instances it is recognised by all concerned that some form of physical intervention will be necessary to ensure safety.

Comprehensive and effective health and safety measures, informed by risk assessments, are in place. These measures successfully safeguard young people from harm as shown in avoidance of any serious accidents or incidents. Staff demonstrate that the system that underpins safety is sufficiently robust to identify potential hazards and ensure that where they exist, action is taken to remove or control them. This is apparent in areas such as fire safety and the protection of the young people from access to substances harmful to health. Staff use risk assessment and health and safety measures constructively to enable the young people to live full and active lives.

Robust measures are established to protect the young people from potential abusers. This includes careful vetting of staff to ensure that they are suitable. For example, staff are not permitted to take up a post in the home without a satisfactory criminal record disclosure. The young people are at ease with staff that are approachable, competent and know them well.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Excellent support is given to the young people to meet all their needs and to ensure they have an enjoyable childhood. In particular, the young people are supported and guided towards establishing a positive self-identity and to establish their own style and interests. Assessment and care planning processes properly recognise the young people's continuing development and a relevant range of services is provided to equip them to understand and successfully adjust to the inevitable physical and emotional changes of adolescence. Staff work effectively in partnership with others, such as the specialist nurses, to provide young people individual support in matters such as their health, disability, sex and relationships.

Daily routines such as communal dining and the extensive range of group and individual leisure activities in which the young people are engaged, ensure that they are involved and experience a sense of inclusion both within the home and the wider community. For example, each young person is a member of a club or has access to leisure facilities outside the home apart from group activities. This enables the young people to establish their own peer friendship network and ensures they are not isolated. All of this is set in the context of needs arising from the young people's diverse racial, religious and cultural background, and means of communication.

Children from minority groups are supported effectively to maintain cultural links and to practise their religion and, where necessary, with their communication. However, insufficient effort is made to ensure that particular young people, with unusual communication difficulties, become more involved the home's social groups.

Staff operate within a clearly thought out set of principles for supporting the young people's education. They are ambitious for the young people to succeed and provide a stimulating environment where learning both formal and informal is encouraged and facilitated. A wide selection of books, games and newspapers are available and some young people have their own computer. Young people benefit from hobbies and leisure interests primarily for enjoyment but some of which contribute to their formal education and promote personal development such as the confidence and poise which some present. The overall impact of these measures is that all the young people are in full-time education. Most enjoy school and are enthusiastic as shown in their regular attendance at school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people, some of whom have complex needs, continue to be provided with exceptional care founded on an effective system of assessment and care planning. Staff know the young people well and are familiar with their individual circumstances. This is aided by comprehensive assessment and care records which also highlight needs arising from the young people's gender and disabilities and, where relevant, their race, religion, culture and communication difficulties. This system ensures continuous assessment in order that staff can respond appropriately to the young people's changing needs. The whole approach is successful because in each case staff work to a clear plan. The plans specify the young people's needs, the care inputs required to meet those needs and data from which progress can be monitored and reviewed. The excellent care that stems from this approach is particularly apparent in maintenance of the young people's good health and support of their education, leisure activities and overall wellbeing.

The home operates within a clear system to support young people joining and leaving its community in ways that minimise any anxieties they may have and create the circumstances for success in both events. The process for determining whether the home is suitable for young people referred for admission is well-established and effective. In all instances, young people join and leave the home on a planned basis and in line with a programme that enables them to understand and be comfortable with the changes involved. Of particular note is the arrangement in some instances whereby staff with which a young person has a strong attachment remain involved until the young person becomes settled in the new environment. Staff are committed to facilitating the young people to maintain constructive contact with their families and friends. Excellent facilities are provided for family contact and exceptional arrangements where this responds to needs in relation the young people's race, religion and culture. Staff demonstrate that they can work effectively with the young people's families and where, as in certain instances, the opportunity is presented

actively, discreetly and sensitively engage the young person's family as partners in his or her care.

Staff adopt the principle that one of the main skills that they need to teach the young people is how to make informed choices. This, of necessity, requires the young people to understand their circumstances and be involved in the planning of their care and review of their progress. Staff therefore demonstrate that most of the young people now have the capacity to influence decisions about their present and future care. Young people are relaxed in the home and exhibit confidence which shows that they are listened to. For example, they opt to pursue different interests and arrange and adorn their own bedrooms to reflect their own personality and interests. They are knowledgeable about the home's routine, staff roles and responsibilities, and who is on duty at particular times.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The home is run on clear, coherent principles and is a carefully planned environment. This together with the established assessment and care planning process contributes successfully to the preparation of young people for adulthood. Staff understand young people's strengths and difficulties, provide care that consolidates their strengths and take action to overcome their difficulties. Their day to day care is fashioned so they incrementally acquire practical living and social skills. For example, young people are taught to prepare simple meals and in some instances have access to a kitchenette to practise doing so. They are also supported to be competent in self-care skills, budgeting and travelling unaccompanied where this is assessed as safely within their capacity. Staff have a good working knowledge of local resources for young adults with special needs and use this well to help young people make the transition to adult services, such as supported accommodation, seamlessly. Young people therefore leave the home in a planned and confident way and successfully adjust to living more independently when they leave the home.

The young people are living in a safe and homely environment, which is equipped to meet their needs. Each young person benefits from facilities that provide them with a very good material standard of living. The facilities such as the training flats are ideal in enabling young people to practise the independent living skills that they are being taught. Communal areas comprising spacious sitting, dining and games rooms provide opportunities for different activities to take place simultaneously. The arrangement in the main kitchen, which is equipped on a domestic scale, enables young people to observe the preparation of food in safety and to be able to use this facility under supervision. Laundry facilities are also more than adequate for the number of young people accommodated. Young people benefit from a pleasing outlook from all areas of the home enhanced by the well-maintained gardens, which are equipped to provide a useful and safe outdoor facility.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The excellent care with which the young people are provided is established on a coherent strategy underpinned by sound, ambitious principles successfully reflected in care practices. This is set out in the Statement of Purpose, which is up to date and accurately reflects the methods used in the care of the young people and the facilities and services which facilitate this. Young people are helped to settle and understand how the home is run and are therefore content. A guide to the home is presented in a format that is likely to be understood and is made available to young people.

Able management and leadership of the home continues to ensure that there is a stable staff team, the members of which are appropriately experienced and qualified to respond to young people's needs, which are diverse and in some instances complex. The stability of the staff team provides the young people with the degree of permanence that they need and harness the skill and competence to sustain the consistent progress which the young people are making.

The registered persons make sound arrangements to maintain continuity of management and leadership of the home in the event of the manager's absence. A well qualified senior team overseen by the service manager ensures in all circumstances there is little or no disruption to the young people's high standards of care. The sound management systems in place and effective leadership which staff are provided enable them to be sufficiently adaptable and flexible in approach so that they can make precise responses to young people's diverse needs. This includes effective communication as shown by formal handover sessions at the end and beginning of shifts and regular staff meetings that keep staff properly briefed about the young people's circumstances and any variations in care arrangements.

Staff training and development remains a key feature of the provisions that the registered person makes to ensure staff look after the young people safely and successfully. In this regard, there is established staff induction, foundation and ongoing in-service training programmes. Staff receive regular one to one supervision and in some instances undertake professional social work training. Staff therefore care for the young people with confidence, skill and professionalism. This is apparent, amongst others, in the area of equality and diversity which is outstanding.

Sustainable management systems are in place which, more than adequately, ensure that there is scrutiny of the care of the young people and safeguard of their welfare. The registered provider's representative makes regular monitoring visits to the home in addition to the routine care audits carried out by managers. This ensures that if or where there are any difficulties, these are identified and dealt with quickly thus contributing to the quality assurance process. Managers also show that they are strategic and forward looking in how they manage the home. In this regard the annual development plan, which sets out objectives to consolidate strengths and promotes improvement, is an established feature. The principal objective for the year

2010/2011 to complete the refurbishment and redecoration of the home has been achieved.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that support is given to any child who uses alternative methods of communication, enabling them to communicate with other children within the home, counter isolation and nurture friendships (NMS 7.2 and 7.3 and 7.4)
- ensure, as far as possible, that there is reasonable balance of female and male staff and account is taken of choice children may wish to make about which staff assist in their intimate care, their disabilities and cultural background (NMS 30.8).